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# MILITARY READINESS

## A Clear Policy Is Needed to Guide Management of Frequently Deployed Units



National Security and  
International Affairs Division

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The Honorable Herbert H. Bateman  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Readiness  
Committee on National Security  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Robert K. Dornan  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Military Personnel  
Committee on National Security  
House of Representatives

This report addresses your concerns that the time military personnel are spending away from home on deployments—commonly called personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO)—has increased and is stressing portions of the military community and adversely affecting readiness.<sup>1</sup> You asked that we review (1) U.S. forces' frequency of deployments in recent years; (2) the effect of increased PERSTEMPO on the readiness of U.S. forces; and (3) Department of Defense (DOD) actions to mitigate the impact of high PERSTEMPO, including efforts to create systems for measuring PERSTEMPO.

## Background

The end of the Cold War and the evolution of a new security environment have resulted in new operating realities for the U.S. military. Amid significant reductions in the overall size of U.S. forces, defense budgets, and overseas presence, the U.S. military must continue to deploy its forces for traditional combat training and simultaneously manage increased demands to deploy forces for peace operations and other activities. U.S. military forces have participated in peace operations for many years. For example, the United States has committed military personnel to the Multinational Force and Observers since 1982 to ensure that Israel and Egypt abide by the provisions of the Sinai Peace Treaty. However, in recent years, U.S. participation in peace operations has grown. In 1992 alone, the United States began deployments eventually totaling 26,000 personnel to Somalia, 3,000 to Bosnia, and 14,000 to Southwest Asia. The ongoing deployment to Bosnia is expected to involve over 20,000 troops.

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this report, a deployment is defined as any period of time longer than 24 hours that a military unit spends away from home for peace operations; humanitarian assistance or disaster relief; counterdrug operations; joint or service-unique training; or other activity. Peace operations range from low-intensity peacekeeping operations, such as military observer duty, to high-intensity peace-enforcement operations.

Congress and others have expressed concern about the overall impact of peace operations on unit and personnel readiness. Deployments for some operations can impair unit and personnel combat training and equipment readiness and divert funds from planned operations and maintenance activities. In other cases, however, deployments can enhance the combat capabilities of units. For example, such deployments provide excellent experience in the tasks essential to wartime proficiency for light infantry, supply, or other support units.

## Results in Brief

DOD cannot precisely measure the increase in deployments because, until 1994, only the Navy had systems to track PERSTEMPO. Historically, the Navy and the Marine Corps have deployed at about twice the rate of the other services, and their rates of deployment have increased only slightly. However, deployments of Air Force and Army personnel have increased significantly in recent years. These increases have affected most heavily a small number of critical units with unique specialties such as special forces units, electronic warfare squadrons, Patriot air defense units, and military police. DOD estimates that the percentage of personnel deployed between 1987 and 1995 increased from about 2 percent to about 6 percent for the Air Force and from about 5 percent to 9 percent for the Army.

Our analysis of a group of high-deploying units over a 4-year period showed that most had elements that were deployed for more than one-half of each year. Peace operations were the driving force behind the increases, accompanied by smaller increases in joint activities.<sup>2</sup> DOD officials believe that deployments could be reduced by eliminating redundant military training and combining or canceling some exercises. Some training has already been reduced.

Status of Resources and Training System (SORTS) reports indicate a stable level of overall unit readiness during the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> According to this measure, less than one-third of the high-deploying units we reviewed dropped below planned readiness levels due to deployments, and this impact was often short-lived. However, SORTS does not capture all the factors that DOD considers critical to a comprehensive readiness analysis, such as operating tempo and personnel morale. In contrast to SORTS data,

<sup>2</sup>Joint activities include joint training among the U.S. services and between U.S. services and other nations' services as well as the show of U.S. force to promote regional stability, support required by treaties with other nations, and other multinational activities.

<sup>3</sup>This system measures the extent to which each unit possesses the required resources and is trained to undertake its wartime missions.

our visits to high-deploying units and discussions with officials in major commands revealed pronounced concerns about personnel problems such as divorces, missed family events and holidays, and lowered retention. Also, although DOD compiles a large number of statistics on personnel readiness, many of the statistics are not useful for depicting conditions in the high-deploying units because they are not collected consistently across the services or are compiled only at major command levels. Therefore, it is not possible to compare general conditions in high-deploying units with those in other units. Data we could obtain on drug testing results and reports of spouse/child abuse showed that rates in both areas were generally lower in the high-deploying units than in others.

The President, Congress, and DOD have taken a variety of actions to study and address the increase in PERSTEMPO, and DOD is considering additional recommendations. However, DOD has not issued regulations that could provide the guidance and discipline needed for long-term management of PERSTEMPO. There is no DOD-wide definition of a deployment, and each service defines it differently. DOD has not directed the services to have goals or policies to limit PERSTEMPO, and the services—with the exception of the Navy—have no clear regulations on this issue. Even though all services have systems to measure deployment activity, there is little consistency in terms of whether unit or individual data are collected and the statistics each provides. DOD officials believe that the high PERSTEMPO operating environment is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. As a result, key units will likely continue to be stressed unless DOD and the services agree on a basic framework for managing PERSTEMPO.

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## **Increases in Peace Operations and Joint Activities Focused on a Small Group of Unique Units**

All services have experienced increased deployments since the late 1980s, with the Air Force and the Army absorbing the largest percentage of changes. However, a small group of units in each service with unique skills in high demand absorbed most of the impact. Peace operations were the major reason for the increases, with smaller increases for joint activities.

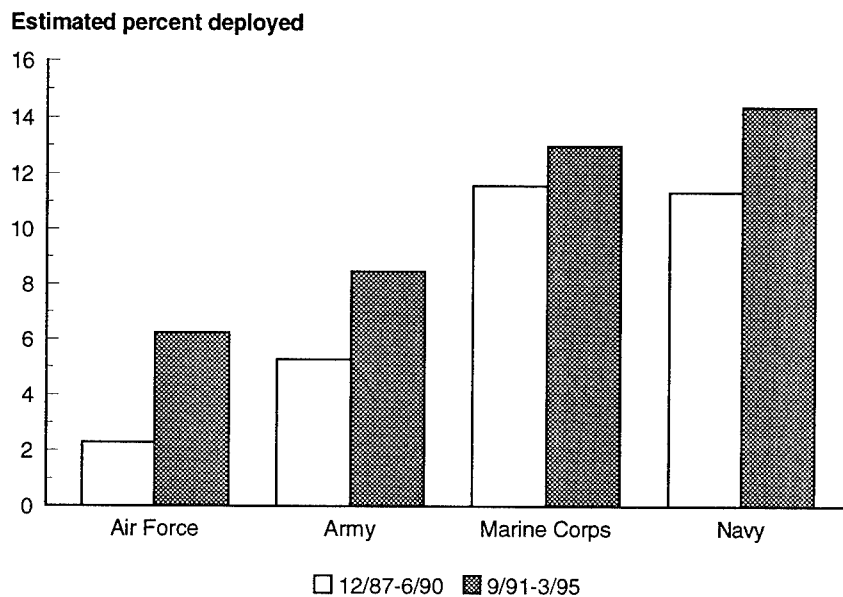
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## **All Services Experience Increases**

DOD cannot precisely measure the increase in deployments because, until 1994, only the Navy had systems to track PERSTEMPO. The Defense Manpower Data Center attempted to reflect the level of PERSTEMPO by matching personnel and pay records with readiness information

identifying units in a deployed status.<sup>4</sup> As shown in figure 1, between 1987 and 1995 the percentage of personnel deployed, as measured by the Center's data, increased for all services.

**Figure 1: Estimated Percent of Services Deployed (1987-95)**



Note: Data from July 1990 through August 1991 was excluded to eliminate effects of the Gulf War. Marine Corps data for September 1991 through March 1992 was excluded due to inaccurate reporting of family separation allowances.

The change was particularly striking in the Air Force and the Army. As figure 1 shows, between the late 1980s and early 1995, Air Force personnel deployed increased, on average, from about 2 percent of the force to over 6 percent. During the same period, the Army increased the percent of its force deployed from an average of 5 percent to about 8.5 percent. One reason for the increase is that DOD's recent drawdown has reduced not only the overall number of personnel in these services but also their overseas presence. Traditionally, personnel in these services operated

<sup>4</sup>This analysis assumed that all members of a unit were deployed if a certain percentage of its personnel were receiving family separation allowances, which are paid to servicemembers away from their families for over 30 days, or imminent danger pay.

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from bases in the United States or from locations in Europe and elsewhere, where their families were also located, with relatively few deployments. Now, fewer personnel are being asked to respond to more deployments, travel farther in doing so, and leave their families while deployed.

The Navy and the Marines experienced much smaller percentage increases, but they were already deploying about two to three times more than the other services. In the late 1980s, about 11 percent of the Navy's force was deployed at any given time. By early 1995 this figure had increased to about 14 percent. Over the same period, the Marine Corps increased the average of its force deployed from about 12 percent to 13 percent. The Navy and the Marine Corps have always had relatively high deployment rates. Personnel in these services have traditionally operated on cyclical deployment schedules on board ships or at forward presence locations across the globe, unaccompanied by their families. Because of their forward-deployed mode of operations, the Navy and the Marines were generally able to respond to increased demands with forces already deployed.

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### Units in Short Supply Heavily Tasked

Increased deployments have fallen most heavily to a few types of units with unique skills in high demand, such as special forces, electronic warfare squadrons, Patriot air defense units, and military police. Many of these critical units are in short supply in the active force, with much of the capability residing in the reserve component. For example, about 75 percent of the military's psychological operations capability resides in the reserve component. We recently reported that the extended or repeated participation of such units in peace operations could impede their ability to respond to major regional contingencies because of the difficulty in quickly disengaging and redeploying them.<sup>5</sup> DOD officials told us that the services should periodically examine force structure to ensure that frequently used capabilities are not contained primarily in the reserves.

DOD is examining the need to increase the number of some high-deploying units. According to the Commander in Chief (CINC) of the European Command, the unified command responsible for operations in Bosnia, the forces needed to fulfill the National Security Strategy—that is, to be prepared to respond to two nearly simultaneous major regional

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<sup>5</sup>Peace Operations: Heavy Use of Key Capabilities May Affect Response to Regional Conflicts (GAO/NSIAD-95-51, Mar. 8, 1995).

contingencies—and those needed for peace operations like Bosnia are not necessarily the same.<sup>6</sup> The major regional contingency scenario requires traditional combat forces, while peace operations and other non-war activities draw heavily upon the types of unique units that are few in number (those units discussed above). The CINC believed that the PERSTEMPO issue is driven by this dichotomy and that current forces should be reevaluated and realigned to address this problem. The European Commander also believed that better coordination of contingency planning among CINCS could reduce the tasking of high PERSTEMPO units. Such planning is currently focused within each unified command's sphere of operations and may not adequately account for changes in one theater that can increase PERSTEMPO in others.

Our analysis of high-deploying units shows that most had at least one element, such as a company or detachment, deployed for over one-half of each year from fiscal year 1992 through June 1995. For example, Air Force electronic warfare squadrons had at least one element deployed an average of 313 days each year. Marine support, ground combat, and aviation units and Army support units had one or more elements deployed, on average, at least 210 days annually during the period. Some individuals were deployed for even longer periods. Even when units return to their home station, individuals may have to spend time away from their homes on other duty. For example, some sailors must provide ship security every fourth night on board ship.

The amount of time deployed between 1992 and 1995 was stable or increasing for most types of units we analyzed. For example, the Army military police units averaged about 160 days on deployment in 1992, but this figure had increased to an average of 172 days in 1995 (projected from third quarter figures). The Navy was the only service whose pace of deployments appeared to be abating. For example, deployments of the five nuclear submarines in our sample dropped from an average of 210 days in 1992 to a projected average of 173 days in 1995. According to officials at the submarine units we visited, the number of submarines had not yet been reduced by the drawdown, so the full complement of ships has been available to deal with the demand. However, officials were concerned that once the number of submarines is reduced, which is expected in the next several years, they would encounter the same difficulties as the other

<sup>6</sup>Each of the nine unified commands is responsible for supporting and achieving U.S. interests in its area of responsibility. For example, the European Command is responsible for most of Europe and parts of the Middle East, and the Special Operations, Transportation, and Space Commands are responsible for specific functional areas. The regional commands are responsible for planning and conducting peace and other operations in their respective areas of responsibility and for determining requirements and conducting joint training.

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services. According to Navy officials, Navy PERSTEMPO has recently been dropping to pre-Gulf War levels.

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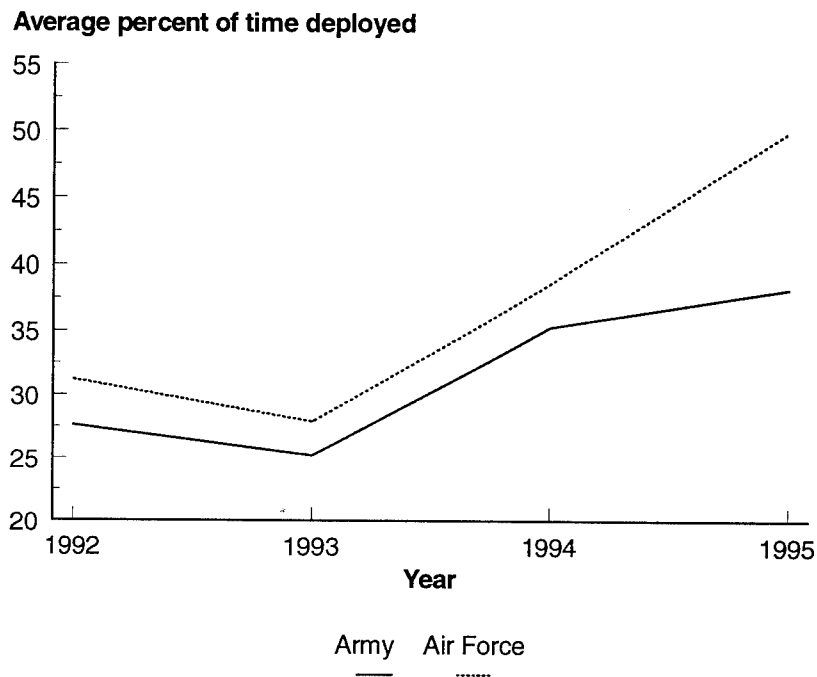
### Peace Operations and Joint Activities Drive Increase in Deployments

In the high-deploying units we studied, most of the increased deployments were for peace operations, particularly those of Air Force and Army units. However, after declining between 1992 and 1993, joint activities between the United States and other nations' forces also increased during 1994-95.

Figure 2 illustrates the Air Force and the Army's steep growth in deployments for peace operations. Navy and Marine officials also noted significant increases in peace operations, but both services generally met increased requirements using units already on scheduled deployments. We were unable to develop detailed statistics on the amount of time these services spent for peace operations because detailed records were not available to isolate time spent on one activity versus another during scheduled deployments.



**Figure 2: Peace Operations for High-Deploying Army and Air Force Units (fiscal years 1992-95)**



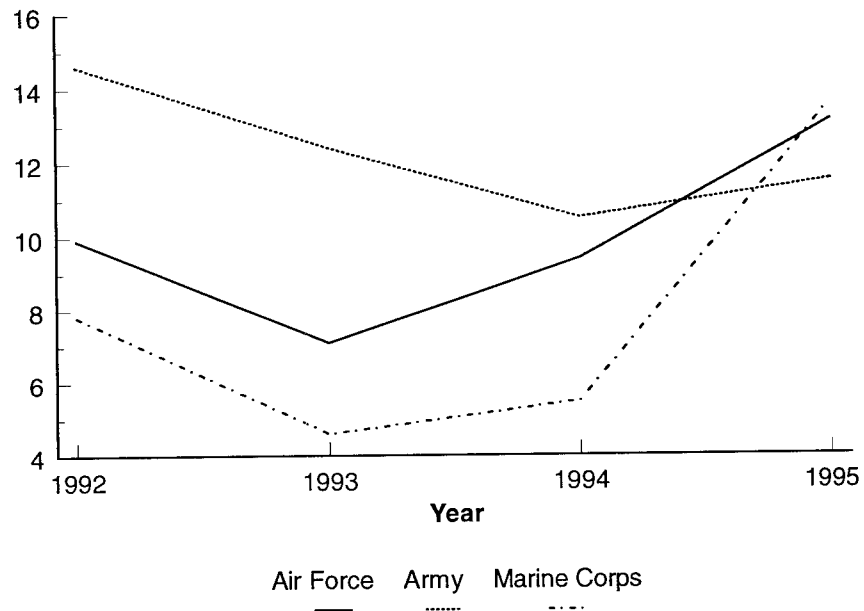
Note: Figures for 1995 are through the third quarter.

Despite the increases in peace operations, the high-deploying units continued to spend most of their time deployed for training, scheduled forward deployments, or other traditional missions. We found no major reductions in the amount of time deployed for training. Throughout 1992-95, each service stayed within about 12 percentage points of its yearly averages for training deployments.<sup>7</sup> However, as shown in figure 3, after declining between 1992 and 1993, joint activities began to increase somewhat in 1994 for the Air Force, the Army, and the Marine Corps. We were unable to separate joint activities from the Navy Atlantic Fleet data on overall training.

<sup>7</sup>Navy statistics are based on Atlantic Fleet ships only. Detailed breakdowns of Pacific Fleet ships were not available.

**Figure 3: Joint Activity in High-Deploying Units** (fiscal years 1992-95)

**Average percent of time deployed**



Note: Figures for 1995 are through the third quarter.

According to many of the CINCS, in addition to the increased deployments for peace operations, there have been large increases in joint activities since the end of the Gulf War. In some commands such activities have more than doubled. These deployments involve myriad actions, such as training exercises between U.S. services and those of other countries, computer simulation exercises, intergovernmental and multinational requirements such as the show of U.S. force to promote regional stability, and support required by treaties with other nations. For example, Partnership for Peace is a new type of exercise that emerged after the Gulf War. This initiative seeks to intensify military and political cooperation throughout Europe and includes participation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries and countries from eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. According to DOD officials, no system tracks all of these activities, and no standardized terminology distinguishes them.

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Consequently, individual contributions to the increases are difficult to analyze precisely.

Increased deployments are rooted in the changing national military strategy. According to DOD officials, the increased focus on regional security and stability has been accompanied by increased deployments for peace operations. Many of these operations involve an increasingly complex integration of diverse land, sea, and air assets from U.S. and other nations' military services, making joint training increasingly important and spurring increased deployments for joint activities. However, the need for deployments for training in each service's individual mission also continues unabated.

DOD officials acknowledged that better balance and management of these competing demands is needed, and DOD has begun to address this need. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Exercise Program annually administers about 200 activities, over two-thirds of which have been focused on objectives other than joint training.<sup>8</sup> Program officials told us that many joint training exercises involve small groups of servicemembers, and they are attempting to reduce them by combining or canceling some exercises. Moreover, program officials said they are continuing to develop joint mission essential task lists to help integrate joint and service training tasks, which could lead to less redundant training.

At the request of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CINCS are also examining exercise plans to prevent redundant training by consolidating, synchronizing, reducing participation in, or canceling exercises. Many of the CINCS and Joint Staff personnel told us that the scope and duration of joint exercises, particularly those involving ineffective large-scale exercises, are already being reduced and many exercises are involving fewer people. One CINC reduced the number of scheduled exercises in his area from 112 in fiscal year 1995 to 85 in fiscal year 1996 by combining smaller, single-service exercises into larger, joint training exercises.

According to DOD officials, many other deployments are generated by intergovernmental and other demands outside the Chairman's program. These officials are developing definitions for all the various types of activities to provide a better basis for analyzing such demands. Officials from the U.S. Atlantic Command, which is responsible for training,

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<sup>8</sup>See our report entitled *Military Capabilities: Stronger Joint Staff Role Needed to Enhance Joint Military Training* (GAO/NSIAD-95-109, July 6, 1995).

packaging, and deploying forces in response to requirements identified by other CINCS, told us that DOD should have a policy regarding the use of DOD assets and personnel to fulfill tasks generated by other government agencies, such as the Department of State. DOD assistance is currently based on guidance and criteria provided by the Office of the President and the Secretary of Defense, and in response to requirements in support of the national security strategy or decisions by the President or other officials in the National Command Authorities. Atlantic Command officials also believe that DOD needs to establish a policy to improve discipline in the long-term scheduling of exercises.

More judicious management of deployments may also require cultural adjustments in the services. Commanders from the unit level through major commands acknowledged that turning down deployment requests was very difficult because they believed that doing so would reflect negatively on the unit and/or on them. The Army Special Forces Commander, for example, recently acknowledged that the command “never met a deployment opportunity that we didn’t like” and challenged the command to curb its traditional appetite for deployments. In fact, a number of officials were concerned that commanders in all the services were competing for deployments to underscore the value of their units during the current drawdown.

## DOD Unable to Measure the Full Impact of Deployments on Readiness

DOD systems are inadequate to assess the full impact of high PERSTEMPO on readiness. Although unit readiness reports indicated a stable level of readiness during the 1990s, the high-deploying units we visited voiced pronounced concern that some personnel have been stressed to their saturation point, with attendant concerns about difficulties in family life and lowered retention rates. The SORTS reports do not capture all the factors that DOD considers critical to a comprehensive readiness analysis, and indicators of personnel readiness—such as retention rates—are generally not available in the form needed to analyze stress on individual units.

## SORTS Reports Indicate Readiness Is Stable

We and the Defense Science Board recently reported that readiness of the overall force has remained generally stable during the 1990s, despite the high level of deployments.<sup>9</sup> However, these reports raise concerns that the high rate of deployments was reducing readiness in a small number of

<sup>9</sup>Military Readiness: Data and Trends for January 1990 to March 1995 (GAO/NSIAD-96-111BR, Mar. 4, 1996) and Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Readiness, June 1994.

units. Our analysis of SORTS reports for a sample of high-deploying units yielded similar results. During the past 5 years, deployments—particularly unscheduled ones—were a primary cause of a reduction in readiness below planned levels in 22 of the 78 units (28 percent) analyzed, as seen in table 1.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1: High-Deploying Units Experiencing Readiness Reductions From Deployments (Mar. 1990-Mar. 1995)**

Service	Total units	Units with reduced readiness	
			Percent of total
Army	33	12	36
Navy	13	0	0
Air Force	14	7	50
Marine Corps	18	3	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>

Source: GAO analysis of DOD readiness reports and discussions with unit and service officials.

Most of the affected units were in the Army and the Air Force. In the Air Force, about one-half the units analyzed experienced reduced readiness during the 5-year period analyzed. About one-third of the Army units experienced reductions. Many of the declines were of short duration and were caused by shortages of personnel; increased consumption of spare parts, which resulted in shortages; and reduced training opportunities associated with the high pace of deployments.

Service officials pointed out that factors other than deployments can have as much, or more, influence on reported readiness levels. For example, Army and Marine Corps officials noted that shortages of noncommissioned officers in certain job skills were affecting many units.

## Concerns About Readiness Not Reflected in Available Reports

During our visits to 29 of the high-deploying units, there was pronounced concern about the impact of high PERSTEMPO on servicemembers and families in all the services except the Navy. Unit officials and personnel told us that while many were experiencing personal and career hardships as a result of the high rate of deployments, they expected to be deployed for some period of the year and most were coping with the stress. Officials said, however, that some had almost reached their saturation point and

<sup>10</sup>Readiness was considered reduced when a unit's C-level ratings dropped below those planned by the services. SORTS reports assess the status of unit personnel, equipment, and training in terms of five overall C-levels. C-1, for example, indicates that the unit possesses the resources and training to undertake its full wartime mission.

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that further increases could create significant retention, substance abuse, and family problems.

Unit personnel described a variety of stresses on individuals and families, such as difficulties in financial management for many young servicemembers and missing the birth of children and their birthdays as well as Christmas and other holidays. Many spoke of retention problems and high divorce rates in high-deploying units. On an Air Force quality-of-life survey conducted in May 1995, more than one-third of Air Force officers and enlisted personnel who responded noted deployment-related impacts on their personal lives and finances. A similar proportion reported career hardships such as difficulty in obtaining professional military education. Army air defense unit officials concluded from a unit-conducted survey that soldiers and spouses were unhappy with frequent deployments. Conducted at the end of a deployment to Southwest Asia, this survey indicated that about 27 percent of the married personnel believed their marriages could be in serious jeopardy if the unit deployed again in the year following its return. About 40 percent of the respondents indicated that they had decided to "get out of the Army" during the deployment.

Members of one Air Force electronic warfare squadron we visited were so stressed by deployments that one wrote to Members of Congress and the Chief of Staff of the Air Force asking for relief due to his concerns about the safety of the squadron. Three of its seven aircraft had been deployed to Bosnia nearly continuously since July 1993. With nearly half its aircraft still in Bosnia, the squadron was unexpectedly tasked to send two more aircraft to Haiti for 2 weeks in September 1994 and three to Saudi Arabia in mid-October 1994. At the same time, the squadron was asked to complete a planned move to a new base. Efforts were made to bring back individuals to accompany their families during the move, but spouses were upset when some servicemembers were redeployed within 48 hours of arrival at the new base. These deployments harmed morale and degraded the unit training program and overall readiness. An Air Force investigation of the incident concluded that the squadron would need 8 to 12 months to regain its prior level of training proficiency. Although a portion of the squadron's aircraft continued to be used for missions, the Chief of Staff directed a portion of the squadron's aircraft to be protected from deployments until the unit had recovered. According to Air Force officials, the squadron had largely recovered by November 1995.

These concerns, however, generally were not reflected in the personnel readiness statistics that we reviewed. To supplement SORTS data, DOD and the services developed a large number of statistics on personnel readiness, such as retention, spouse and child abuse, drug abuse, divorces, and court-martials. However, many statistics are not collected consistently across the services or are aggregated at major command and/or servicewide levels only, preventing comparisons of conditions in individual units with others.<sup>11</sup> We also found little agreement among the services as to which indicators are the best measures of personnel readiness.

We did, however, obtain data comparing retention in our Navy sample of units with those Navy-wide. Personnel retention rates in the sampled units were 6 to 15 percentage points lower than overall Navy levels between 1991 and June 1995. These results are consistent with Center for Naval Analyses reports conducted in 1992 and 1994, which found that more time at sea reduces retention rates for enlisted personnel.<sup>12</sup> The Navy was the only service that maintained this data at the unit level. The other services aggregated their retention data at major commands and above.

The Defense Manpower Data Center prepared a special analysis comparing reports of (1) positive drug tests and (2) spouse and child abuse in our sample of units with servicewide rates between 1991 and 1994. In general, rates in both areas were lower in the high-deploying units than in the services as a whole. DOD is developing a central registry for all reports of child and spouse abuse with standardized data elements for collection of case information. The central registry is expected to be fully implemented in 1996.

## DOD Is Taking Action, but Requirements for Managing PERSTEMPO Are Unclear

The President, Congress, and DOD have recognized the problems generated by increases in PERSTEMPO and have taken steps to address them. In addition, DOD is considering a number of recommendations intended to mitigate PERSTEMPO problems. However, DOD policy on PERSTEMPO is unclear in many areas.

<sup>11</sup>Our report *Military Readiness: DOD Needs to Develop a More Comprehensive Measurement System* (GAO/NSIAD-95-29, Oct. 27, 1994) raises similar concerns.

<sup>12</sup>*Implications of Changes in Time Spent at Sea* (CAB 94-19, Mar. 1994); *Personnel Tempo of Operations and Navy Enlisted Retention* (CRM 91-150, Feb. 1992).

## Actions Underway to Manage High PERSTEMPO

In May and July 1994, the President signed a new Presidential Decision Directive and national security strategy that included policies designed to make U.S. involvement in peace operations more selective. For example, one policy sets forth specific standards of review to help determine when the United States should participate or support peace operations, including whether the role of U.S. forces is tied to clear objectives and an identified end point. It also states that the primary mission of the U.S. armed forces remains to be prepared to fight and win two nearly simultaneous regional contingencies.

Legislation has also been introduced in Congress to address the impact of high PERSTEMPO. For example, in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1996, Congress recognizes that excessively high PERSTEMPO for military personnel degrades unit readiness and morale and can adversely affect unit retention. The act encourages DOD to continue improving techniques for defining and managing PERSTEMPO with a view toward establishing and achieving reasonable PERSTEMPO standards for all military personnel.

DOD and the services have also taken actions to better manage high PERSTEMPO. In addition to the actions taken to reduce deployments by better integrating joint and service training requirements, the Joint Staff has drafted the global military force policy. This policy is designed to help guide decisions to use units few in number but high in demand for peace operations and other types of deployments. The policy will outline the impact that successively higher levels of deployment have on unit maintenance, training, and other readiness areas. DOD officials hope to finalize the policy during the spring of 1996. DOD is also developing a new Joint Personnel Asset Visibility System, which uses electromagnetic identification cards to track personnel assigned to Joint Task Force operations. In addition, PERSTEMPO is discussed at the Joint Monthly Readiness Review, which provides a venue for input from both the services and the CINCS on readiness assessments.

DOD and the services are using the reserves to relieve active duty units and lower PERSTEMPO. For example, the Air Force used reserves to relieve highly stressed squadrons in Europe, and the Marine Corps used reserve rifle companies to relieve active duty Marines in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. According to DOD officials, the success of this approach is dependent on (1) better identification of and planning for requirements, (2) flexibility in the training and use of reservists, and (3) programming the funding to meet needs.



The services continuously monitor retention levels of individuals and job specialties, and the Army and the Air Force already have or plan to offer bonuses and increase the number of personnel in some high-deploying units, such as air defense artillery or airborne warning and control system units. The Air Force has sought relief from the taskings for airborne warning and control system units to catch up on lost training opportunities. It has also instituted its Palace Tenure System, which helps ensure that support taskings are balanced across their entire force. The Navy has adopted a revised training strategy tailored to the new requirements and expects to reduce the days deployed for training up to 10 percent for ships underway. The Navy has also reorganized the fleets and established a permanent Western Hemisphere Group to more efficiently fulfill Caribbean, counternarcotics, and South American commitments.

## PERSTEMPO Requirements Are Unclear, and Service Systems Are Inconsistent

It is difficult for DOD to determine the actual time that either military personnel or their units are deployed. This information is important to planning and managing contingency operations. Although all services now have systems to measure PERSTEMPO, each service has different (1) definitions of what constitutes a deployment, (2) policies or guidance for the length of time units or personnel should be deployed, and (3) systems for tracking deployments (see table 2).

**Table 2: Service Deployment  
Measurement Systems**

Measurement	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
Definition of deployment:	7 days or more	56 days or more	1 day or more	10 days or more away from home station
Policy or regulation limiting deployments:	No policy, but goal of no single deployment over 179 days	Yes, policy limits deployments to 180 days/6 months	No policy, but maximum desired level of 120 days per year	No policy, but goal of no single deployment over 6 months
System tracking capabilities	Unit and individual	Unit only	Major weapon systems and individual	Unit only

As noted on table 2, the Army defines a deployment as a movement during which a unit spends 7 days (3 days for Special Forces) or more away from its home station. However, deployments to combat training centers, which generally last about 3 weeks, are not counted. In contrast, the Marine Corps defines a deployment as any movement from the home station for

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10 days or more, including a deployment for training at its combat training center.

DOD is currently considering several recommendations made by its PERSTEMPO Working Group and a Defense Science Board task force.<sup>13</sup> For example, these reports recommend that (1) a Joint Staff readiness and training oversight panel oversee joint exercises and service inspection activities to help reduce deployment demands and (2) the CINCS establish plans for the rotation of units and personnel involved in operations that exceed 6 months. DOD and European Command officials said that they do not plan to rotate the combat units in Bosnia after 6 months. Rather, they will stay as long as needed, up to 364 days. However, they will receive a rest and relaxation break after 179 days. According to these officials, rotating units in and out of Bosnia is costly and could cause operating inefficiencies.

The Defense Science Board report also recommends that DOD issue a single formula for counting deployed time among the services: 1 day away equals 1 day deployed. In this regard, the report of the Working Group recommended that the services continue to refine their PERSTEMPO systems but, at a minimum, permit a computation of averages for length of deployment, time between deployments, percent of time deployed, and percent of inventory deployed—at the unit or individual skill level.

One key issue in the decision of whether and how much to standardize PERSTEMPO systems is the need for flexibility to accommodate the unique nature of each service's missions and deployment practices. In this regard, officials in the U.S. Special Operations Command told us that they have developed their own PERSTEMPO system because of concerns that the various service systems do not reflect the unique demands placed on Special Forces personnel. U.S. Atlantic Command officials believed that all services should be required to track PERSTEMPO by unit to help them make better decisions concerning unit deployments. Similarly, European Command officials called for DOD to direct a single method to identify which units are tasked, including an objective goal for PERSTEMPO management.

The Working Group's June 1995 report noted that the services had a number of concerns in this regard, including concerns that

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<sup>13</sup>Report of the PERSTEMPO Working Group, June 1995; Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Quality of Life, October 1995.

- such systems and thresholds could erode traditional service roles and usurp service responsibilities,
- such thresholds may lead to unmanageable restrictions on unit and individual deployability, and
- such systems may require an unnecessary and expensive level of detail.

The PERSTEMPO Working Group is finalizing its second study and is due to report in the near future. The report will address whether current deployment measurement systems are appropriate and provide overall conclusions on the status of PERSTEMPO today as well as recommendations for further courses of action.

## Recommendations

To provide the oversight and guidance needed for long-term management of PERSTEMPO, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense

- identify key indicators that provide the best measures of deployments' impact on personnel readiness and adjust existing databases to allow research comparing these indicators in high PERSTEMPO units, skill groups, or weapon systems to other such groups and
- issue DOD regulations that guide service management of PERSTEMPO by (1) establishing a DOD-wide definition of deployment; (2) stating whether each service should have a goal, policy, or regulation stipulating the maximum amount of time units and/or personnel may be deployed; and (3) defining the minimum data on PERSTEMPO each service must collect and maintain.

## Agency Comments

In a meeting to discuss the Department's comments on a draft of this report, DOD officials said they generally agreed with our findings and recommendations. In written comments on the draft report (see app. II), DOD said that it has taken, and will continue to take, numerous initiatives to manage PERSTEMPO. Also, DOD said that it will be considering recommendations made in the PERSTEMPO Working Group's report that is due to be published in the near future.

## Scope and Methodology

To assess the frequency of deployments and their impact on readiness, we focused our analyses on about 80 high-deploying active duty units in the four services and the Special Operations Command (see app. I). At our request, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force provided us with a list of 68 combat and support units that were the highest deployers in the 5 types

of units most frequently deployed. The Marine Corps did not have the historical data to identify units with particularly high deployment rates. Instead, we used a group of 18 Corps-identified units representing a cross-section of Marine units. We obtained deployment histories for 83 of these units and complete SORTS readiness histories for 78 of the units. For these units, we analyzed available readiness-related statistics and conducted case study visits to 29 judgmentally selected units. The case study units were selected to provide broad coverage of the types of units in each service as well as geographical diversity.

To determine the frequency of deployments in recent years, we relied primarily on an analysis performed by the Defense Manpower Data Center, based on a special database approximating the frequency of deployments by measuring family separation and imminent danger pay. We did not verify the Center's data. We supplemented this data with deployment histories collected directly from the high-deploying units and information from a recently created Joint Staff database. We also discussed the status of efforts to measure PERSTEMPO with each service and the Joint Staff.

We assessed the impact of high PERSTEMPO on readiness through a two-tiered process. We assessed readiness of the overall force at the unit level by using our recently completed analysis of force readiness. We also compared SORTS ratings for the high-deploying units from 1991 to 1995 with profiles of targeted ratings. We then compared ratings below expected levels with unit explanations of degradations in readiness, supplementing this analysis with discussions at the major command level. To assess the impact of deployments on individual readiness, we reviewed available literature and held discussions with individual service and unit officials. Because there was no agreement regarding the best indicators of the impact of deployments on individuals and because of data limitations, our work in this area was limited to data on spouse and child abuse and positive drug tests from the Defense Manpower Data Center and Navy data on retention.

To review DOD actions to mitigate the impact of high PERSTEMPO, we reviewed DOD reports and held discussions with DOD, service, and unit officials.

We conducted our review from May 1995 to January 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations, Senate Committee on Armed Services, and House Committee on National Security, and to the Secretaries of Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III. If you or your staff have questions about this report, please call me on (202) 512-5140.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mark E. Gebicke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark E. Gebicke  
Director, Military Operations  
and Capabilities Issues



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## Abbreviations

CINC	Commander in Chief
DOD	Department of Defense
PERSTEMPO	personnel tempo
SORTS	Status of Resources and Training System





# Types of Units Included in Our Sample of High-Deploying Units

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Army

Special Forces/Rangers  
General support (quartermaster, field services,  
and general supply)  
Air defense artillery/Patriot batteries  
Military police  
Mechanized infantry

Navy

Tank landing ships  
Perry-class frigates  
Ticonderoga-class cruisers  
Spruance-class destroyers  
Burke-class destroyers  
Nuclear-powered fast attack submarines

Air Force

Special operations squadrons  
Airborne warning and control system squadrons  
Electronic jamming squadrons  
Reconnaissance squadrons

Marine Corps

Fighter attack squadrons  
Harrier attack squadrons  
Electronic warfare squadrons  
Light attack helicopter squadrons  
Infantry battalions  
Communications battalions  
General support (maintenance and engineering)  
and battalions/squadrons  
Light armored reconnaissance battalions  
Aviation command and control group

# Comments From the Department of Defense



PERSONNEL AND  
READINESS

THE OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
4000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-4000



MAR 16 1996

Mark E. Gebicke  
Director, Military Operations and  
Capabilities Issues  
National Security and International Affairs Division  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Gebicke:

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the General Accounting Office (GAO) draft report, "MILITARY READINESS: A Clear Policy and Better Oversight Are Needed to Guide Management of Frequently Deployed Units" (GAO Code 703096/OSD Case 1096). The DoD technical and detailed comments, annotated on a copy of the draft report, were provided separately to the GAO staff.

The Department and the Services have taken and are continuing to undertake numerous initiatives - many of which were noted in the GAO's draft report - to manage PERSTEMPO. DoD will also be considering the recommendations of the PERSTEMPO Working Group which is due to report out in the near future. The Working Group report will address most of the issues discussed by the GAO draft.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

Edwin Dorn



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# Major Contributors to This Report

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National Security and  
International Affairs  
Division, Washington,  
D.C.

Sharon A. Cekala  
Charles J. Bonanno, Jr.  
Jose M. Pena, III

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Atlanta Field Office

John W. Nelson  
John H. Pendleton  
Gerald L. Winterlin

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